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VOX

Welcome to Issue 15.

As promised, this issue is inclined towards the essay rather than the usual crop of interviews. In future issues it's hoped to mix things up a bit.

Contributions or ideas for contributions are welcome: especially those related to improvised music.

The **Back Issues** department is looking much healthier with the return of a few issues long out of circulation.

Details inside the back cover.

If you would like to be kept informed about the timing of the next issue (planned for Spring 1994), please send

a SAE (UK) or 1 IRC (Overseas).

I'm afraid a mailing list is not a cost-effective idea for a free magazine.

Finally, if you can help with **distribution** (i.e. putting leaflets in your local

experimental music shop or at relevant gigs), please get in touch.

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Chris Blackford/November 1993

15

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editor/publisher/designed
and struggled with

Chris Blackford

If you find mistakes in this magazine, please remember that they are there for a purpose. We try to publish something for everyone, and some people are always looking for mistakes.

somewhere there's music



text: **John Russell**

image: **Phillip Edwards**

John Russell is a guitarist who has been working in improvised music for over 20 years.

For me, the terms 'conventional' and 'unconventional' when applied to instrumental techniques are practically worthless in the context of free improvisation, and not a great deal of use in other musics. One of my aims is to have the ability to use all the sound elements that the instrument can produce and, in improvising, to constantly pick and choose their meaning (i.e. their musical function) within the context of a developing music. This runs against the critical grain that searches for a fixed context upon which to pin musicians and their work, rather in the way a Victorian lepidopterist would display butterflies: by killing them.

Musicians, too, can fly into the net by thinking that playing the 'right' notes in the 'right' order and in the 'right' place makes them something they're not. For the student, imitation has some place but it is adventurers and explorers that make the real music. With few exceptions, this creative edge is generally anathema to a music industry that now, more than ever, is built upon the regurgitation of yesterday's food, constantly reprocessed and repackaged. We are told this makes market sense. What other sense does it make? The market-force dogma is put forward not only as an extrinsic means of exchange and communication but also intrinsically as the message itself. Aided and abetted by abuses of new technology, 'live' music becomes reduced to a hollow spectacle serving only to allow an audience to be but never to become. The delight in developing and sharing skills (and by 'skills' I mean those of both playing and listening) is replaced by a screw-driver and assembly plan. It is against this backdrop of an ever more immobile and immobilising world that those musicians and audiences who celebrate innovation, originality and the necessity and inexorability of change, seek to make a new sensibility.

One responds to music 'through many different filters and combinations of filters that are built up over time. The creative musician/listener is constantly analysing, revaluing and reorganising these, while at the same time trying to find new ones to generate further possibilities; but it is in

the act of improvising that 'quantum leaps' can occur. Indeed, sometimes the whole architecture crumbles, leaving nothing at all as a reference point. Then it's time to forget the parade ground of spit, polish and square-bashing.

This applies to both solo and group playing, but there are differences between the two. I don't propose to go into the details of solo playing here, except to say that it is, or should be, an invaluable part of any musician's work and that both solo and group playing can inform each other.

A good group is, for me, one where the musicians share a common commitment to musical development whilst fully recognising each individual's contribution. This does not, of course, imply anything as banal as finding a lowest common denominator, but rather an epiphany.

As an acoustic guitar player, and therefore having a limited dynamic, it may seem surprising that

The notion of changing one's music to make it 'more accessible' is to lose sight of the objective.

in such circumstances as Radu Malfatti's Ohrkiste, Chris Burn's Ensemble and my own twelve-piece project who performed at this year's London Jazz Festival, the guitar is not swamped by the volume (number and dy-

namic) of the other instruments. I can assure you that this has as much or more to do with the skills of the other musicians as it has to do with me. This applies to working in ad hoc situations, including those brought together for specific projects, much as in longer-term, more fixed companies. Provided a platform (and thanks to the London Jazz Festival here for their help with the recent Mopomoso event) specific projects can offer a way to present one's work in the context of a larger improvising community, develop existing associations and juxtapose previously divergent strands.

Regular groups offer something else again. Recently reunited with my colleagues in News From The Shed, at the Nickelsdorf Festival, the music had a sophistication that was even more than the sum of its far from inconsequential constituent parts; a brilliant coherence of elements stretching far beyond any usual breaking points. When a regular group of the calibre of News From The Shed is pulling out the stops, it's just a joy to be part of it all as it unfolds.

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As a musician, one's overriding responsibility has to be to music and through this to any audience, real or potential. The notion of changing one's music to make it 'more accessible' is to lose sight of the objective.

In terms of production this is manifested by trying constantly to raise standards at venues. With generally ill-informed and ill-willed mediators between musician and the general public, this sometimes seems an almost Herculean task. Here we can but hope for a world of musicians who don't throw away any complexity or depth in striving for clarity; for promoters who provide the best services at their disposal and for audiences not only willing to participate aurally, but to sometimes turn a blind eye to some of the seemingly incongruous circumstances within which this music is often forced to take place. **R**

SELECTED DISCOGRAPHY

Homecooking ... (solo) Incus 31

Tea Time (w Beresford/Coombes/Todd/Solomon) Incus 15

Conceits (w Butcher/Durrant) Acta 1

News From The Shed (w Malfatti/Butcher/Durrant/Lovens) Acta 4

Cultural Baggage (w Ensemble: Burn/Butcher/Denley/Wishart/Durrant/Mattos/Hutchinson) Acta 5 CD

Live At The Qua Qua (w Electric String Trio: Wachsmann/Mattos) Bead 2

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Islam's contribution to Jazz & Improvised musics



text: **Pat Thomas**

Pat Thomas (born 27/7/60 - piano & electronics) started playing at 16 after seeing Oscar Peterson on TV. At 18 he became interested in free jazz and improvised music after watching performances by artists such as Nigel Morris, Tony Moore, Paul Dunmall, Paul Rogers, Paul Rutherford, Peter Brotzmann and Tony Oxley at the Old Fire Station Arts Centre in Oxford. He has worked mainly in these areas since then.

Current activities include duos with Mark Sanders and Lol Coxhill, trios with Steve Beresford and Francine Luce, The Switch and Alex Ward, quartets with Derek Bailey, Matt Wand and Tony Oxley, Phil Minton, Roger Turner and Dave Tucker.

The 20th Century has been dominated by myths. The myth of evolution,¹ of psychoanalysis,² of feminism,³ etc. One of the great myths maintained in music has been the 'jazz history' myth. The story generally states that out of the marching bands mainly situated in New Orleans a music developed called *jass*. *Jass* was a new music which had roots rhythmically in Africa and roots harmonically in Europe, and yet could not have developed in any other place but the United States of America. As with all myths there is an element of truth in them. However, I think it is amazing that this is generally accepted as 'the facts'.

The Origin of *Jass*

Let us look at the word *jass*. This word is still regarded as a bit of a mystery. The official definition is that it is a word associated with sex. Most 'experts' agree that the rhythms of *jass* can be traced to West Africa. It's assumed that it is rooted in 'ancient African religions'. This usually means *yoruba* religion or any African 'pagan' belief. In fact, if just one 'expert' had cared to investigate properly, they would have found that the dominant religion in West Africa is Islam.

The holy book of the Muslims is the Qur'an. The language of the Qur'an is Arabic. A language used by West African Muslims is Arabic. *Jass* is an Arabic word. The *Hans Wehr Dictionary* of modern written Arabic (p.125) has several meanings for the word *jass*. They are: to touch; feel; to test; probe; sound; to be a spy. Idries Shah in his book *The Sufis* (p.180) also mentions the word, defining it as "to scrutinize (hidden things) ... this is the root of the word for 'espionage' and hence the Sufi is called the Spy of the Heart. To the Sufi the scrutinization for the purpose of ascertaining hidden things is an equivalent, poetically speaking, with the motive for concentrating the mind." Every jazz buff knows how important *feel* is for a great jazz performance. It is also fair to say that an interest in sound and searching for new ways of expressing yourself are at the heart of jazz. It is quite clear that these meanings found in the Arabic give a good description of the music, unlike the slang meaning used in English. It is also quite clear that in entering the English vocabulary its original meanings have

been distorted.

Another key jazz term is the jam session. It has always been in jam sessions where new ideas have been tried out. For example, it is inconceivable to imagine bebop happening without the gatherings that took place in Mintons. Jam sessions have been crucial to the development of jazz. The word *jam* is Arabic. Among its meanings are: gathering; collection; combination; relax; union (*Hans Wehr* p. 134-135). In fact, the English language is saturated with Arabic words like lemon, coffee, lilac, jasmine, algebra, zero, alcohol. Clearly it looks as though jazz has roots in the Muslim culture of West Africa. Despite losing knowledge of their past, some words, like *jass* and *jam*, have remained more or less intact. Another is the slang term 'hey'. This word has been used to great effect by the "Godfather of Soul" James Brown, and has been part of the jazz vocabulary since at least the 1930s. There is no doubt that this comes from the Arabic word *hayy*, whose meanings include: living; lusty; energetic, and tribe.

These few examples show they cannot be dismissed as mere coincidences. Obviously some key jazz terms are Arabic. This 'secret language' is the basis of so-called "Black Talk". It also explains why so many jazz musicians of African descent have embraced Islam. The list includes Ahmad Jamal, Yusef Lateef, Art Blakey, Kenny Clarke, Billy Higgins, McCoy Tyner. All of these musicians have played a major part in developing jazz music.

The Spanish Connection

Let us now look at the Western element of jazz. The origins of 'Western music' are to be found in Moorish Spain. The Moors of Spain who were actually Spanish, accepted Islam when the Muslims invaded in 711. The so-called 'Arab invasion' did not in fact take place since the 7000 strong army only had a total of 300 Arabs; the majority of this army consisted of Syrians, Copts and Berbers. The Muslims ruled Spain for over 700 years, losing control to the Catholic church in 1492.

It was in Spain that many of the instruments associated with Western music first appeared. They include the lute, guitar and the rebec (the first bowed instrument to appear in Europe, and derived from the rebab, the Arab viol), as well as the

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organ and tambourine. From Spain they entered the rest of Europe and travelled as far as England where the *canan* (qunun), lute and rebec (apparently a favourite of Chaucer's) were played. 'Measured music' was already in existence during the 900s in parts of the Islamic world. This consisted of using notation and giving notes fixed measures, a sketch that could be filled out by the musician with an extemporary flourish. The musician could refer to the notation as a reminder of a particular melody.

Such 'novelty' was to be of seminal importance to the European world, since it was via Spain that notation appeared in Europe. Abu'l-Hasan Ali Ibn Nafi, whose nickname was Ziryab because of his dark complexion, added a fifth string to the lute. Regarded as one of the finest musicians of all time, he is credited with introducing new modes and forms originating from Persia which were to have a profound affect on the music of Spain. I think it's fair to say: no Ziryab, no flamenco. The fifth string added was considered to represent the Soul. A parallel with jazz and other 'Black musics' is the importance of playing with feeling or soul. Needless to say, it is not so far fetched to regard the roots of Black Soul music as having originated in Europe, after all.

The Sufi Influence

The first troubadours were found in Spain. The word 'troubadour' is derived from the Arabic word *tarab*. Some scholars have claimed it comes from the romance word *trobar*, meaning 'to find'. But if we look at what the meanings for *tarab* are in Arabic we find that they include: joy; pleasure; entertainment with music; a musical instrument (the rebab)⁴. The troubadours are said to have been "part of a culture which valued improvised poetry/music events and aural traditions."⁵ I think it's quite clear that *tarab* gives a better explanation than *trobar*.

Syncopated rhythms are at the heart of jazz. In Spain and other parts of the Islamic world the use of cross-rhythms and syncopation became prominent during the 9th Century. This is due entirely to the influence of the Sufis. The Sufis have been erroneously considered as being outside 'orthodox' Islam and as having very little regard for the *Sharia*

(explaining what are Halal (permitted) and Haram (forbidden) actions), and the *Sunnah* (practices of the prophet Muhammed (S.A.W.)). In fact, Sufis insist that the *Sharia* is the road that leads to *Tariqa* (Sufi Orders), and *Tariqa* is based completely on the *Sunnah*.

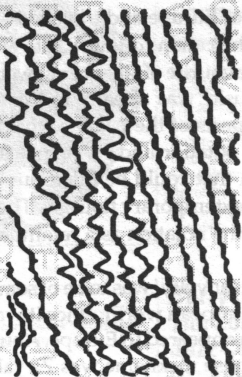
Clearly, a lot of inaccurate writing about jazz, in particular, could have been avoided if the anti-Islam bias wasn't so strong in America and Europe.

The *Chisti Tariqa*, founded by Khwaja Abu Ishaq Chisti (d. 966), is well known for its use of music in its spiritual exercises. "The wandering dervishes of the order were known as *chist*. They would enter a town and play a rousing air with flute and drum to gather people round them... Traces of this figure occur even in Europe, where the Spanish *chistu* is found with closely similar garb and instruments — a sort of itinerant jester."⁶ It was through Spain that minstrel music entered Europe, spreading as far as England with Morris dancing.

The *Chisti Tariqa*, however, "made their most enduring impact upon India. For the past nine hundred years their musicians have been esteemed throughout the subcontinent."⁷ Amir Khusrau (1253-1325) is considered to be the founder of Hindustani music.

"Hindustani music developed the more intimate and subtle features of note and melody, receiving and transforming many new Persian and Arabic tunes and ragas (for example, *Huseini*, *Hejaz*, *Kafi*, *Bahar*). From Muslim influence date the different names given to identical ragas and the longer and more flexible time-measures."⁸

Amir Khusrau also invented the sitar and the tabla. Some scholars have questioned whether he did invent them, but there is no doubt that his influence is paramount and all of the main instruments of Hindustani music (the sarod, tanbura and shahnai) are derived from Muslim instruments. Moreover, the influence of Indian music on improvisors such as Coltrane, Dolphy, Derek Bailey, Tony Oxley, Matt Lewis, etc., and on Western composers like Messiaen and La Monte Young, gives a further indication of how far-reaching the



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underlying Islamic influence has been.

In conclusion, it seems astonishing that materials so easily available have not been used before. Clearly, a lot of inaccurate writing about jazz, in particular, could have been avoided if the anti-Islam bias wasn't so strong in America and Europe. This would also explain why the Muslim contribution to improvised musics, clearly of major importance, has been overlooked. **R**

Notes

1. M. Denton, *Evolution - A Theory In Crisis*, 1985
2. E. M. Thornton, *The Freudian Fallacy - Freud And Cocaine*, 1981
3. N. Davidson, *The Failure Of Feminism*, 1985
4. *Hans Wehr Arabic-English Dictionary*, p. 555
5. Jim Denley, 'Improvisation: The Entanglement Of Awareness And Physicality', *Resonance*, Volume 1 Number 1, October 1992
6. Idres Shah, *The Way Of The Sufi*, p. 127
7. *Ibid.*
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- Spirou** (Various Artists, w Continental Drift) **Nato**
Vol Pour Sidney (Various Artists, w Lol Coxhill) **Nato**
Tony Oxley Quartet (w Oxley, Bailey, Wand) **Incus**
Coxhill/Thomas (*forthcoming*) **Nato**

Pat Thomas was interviewed in **Rubberneck** 9.

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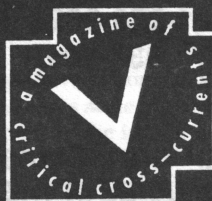
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Although initially conceived as a project for improvisors, Plexus will be of interest to many composer-musicians, sound sculptors, environmental recordists, performance artists and readers of poetry/prose, dancers (record the sounds your feet and body make) or even visual artists (e.g. put a contact microphone on the canvas while you paint!). The only specification is that partici-

pants' contributions should be conceived musically as one half of a duet; participants may interpret this request as they wish.

Plexus has already attracted the interest of many collaborators from the UK and across the world. Conventional instrumental ability is less important than the will to participate creatively. Plexus is essentially a form of workshop and is unlikely to become either a commercial project or a source of career enhancement for those involved. For detailed information and guidelines write to **Plexus, 59 Plantation Road, Amersham, Buckinghamshire HP6 6HW, UK.**

PUBLICATIONS

The Aerial, based in Santa Fe, USA, is "A Journal in Sound", i.e. a CD with booklet notes mostly written by the contributors. #1 came out in Winter 1990, including the likes of David Moss, Malcolm Goldstein and Floating Concrete Octopus; subsequent releases featured Jin Hi Kim, LaDonna Smith & Davey Williams, Peter Cusack, Nicolas Collins, Brenda Hutchinson and Elise Kermani. The latest, #5 (1992), contains nine tracks (73 mins) dealing with text-based spoken and sung compositions, concrete soundscapes, tape manipulation and improvisation, including Willem De Ridder & Hafler Trio, Sarah Peebles, The Machine for Making Sense, and a hilarious Derek Bailey vocal/guitar rendition of a Henry Kaiser interview. Attractive presentation and definitely for the adventurous listener keen to expand their horizons. Recommended. (*editor: Steve Peters, The Aerial, P.O. Box 2638, Santa Fe, NM 87504, USA.*)

The **International Society for Jazz Research** sends news of its yearbook **Jazzforschung (Jazz Research)**, the first of which appeared in 1969. Texts are published in German and English, addressing varieties of jazz, blues, occasionally improvised music using the apparatus of sociology, psychology, ethnology, pedagogics and musicology. Never having seen a copy, I can't comment on the general readability of the texts. #25 (1993) appears to contain just one piece concerning John Coltrane and the Afro-American Oral Tradition. *International Society for Jazz Research, Leonhardstrasse 15, A-8010 Graz, Austria.*

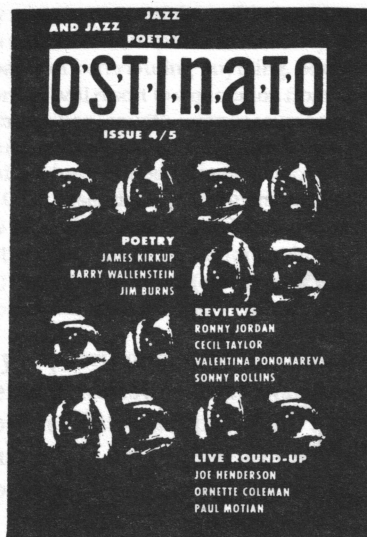
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UPDATE

If you get to read the above index you'll quickly realise just how few and far between are the magazines allocating space to improvised and experimental musics, though, as mentioned beforehand, some have yet to be discovered by the Jazz-Institut. *Rubberneck* escaped its attention for six years. Consequently, expect some repetition in this *Improvew* column as we keep you updated on known magazines. The following issues are 'latest' at the time of going to print.

Musiche #13 contains interviews with Jon Rose, Arto Lindsay and Canterbury stalwart Richard Sinclair whose career appears to be enjoying something of a renaissance. Also articles on Butch Morris, Anthony Braxton, God and This Heat. *Musiche*, Piazza Brin 13, 19122 La Spezia, Italy.

Notes #43 has interviews with prog-rock maestro Peter Hammill, Claude Barthelemy, Alboth, and Fish and Roses. Also a tribute to John Cage, plus album and gig reviews. *Notes*, 16 rue Hignard, 44000 Nantes, France.

Ostinato issue 4/5 is finally available. Jazz poetry by James Kirkup, Barry Wallenstein, Jim Burns, Lawrence Upton, etc. The lengthy review section includes Sun Ra, Valentina Ponomareva and Jon Lloyd. £4.95 plus £1.20 P&P from *Ostinato*, P.O. Box 522, London N8 7SZ.

Resonance now on to its second issue has an interview with British instrument-builders and improvisors Morphogenesis. Articles/polemic include Paul Burwell, Roger Sutherland, Jonathan Harvey, and Michael Ritchie on the nitty-gritty of business and improv. *Resonance*, 2nd Floor, Community Music House, 60 Farringdon Road, London EC1.

Revue & Corrigée #14 interviews Christian Marclay, Bob Ostertag and Michel Mandel, and discusses the work of experimental film-maker Stan Vanderbeek. The featured label is Extreme; plus the usual plethora of leading-edge album reviews. *Revue & Corrigée*, 25 rue Docteur Bordier, 38100 Grenoble, France.

Variant now regularly features articles and reviews of experimental musics. #15 interviews Steve Reich and Beryl Korot, reviews London's Secret Spaces project, European experimental music festivals, plus a welcome re-evaluation of Scottish film director Bill Douglas, etc. *Variant*, 73 Robertson Street, Glasgow G2 8QD, Scotland.

Please send relevant information for this column to *Rubberneck (Improvew)*, 21 Denham Drive, Basingstoke, Hampshire, RG22 6LT, England. And please remember that the magazine is published twice-yearly in Spring and Autumn, so don't send material that is likely to be horribly out of date by the time it is published. **R**

Improvew compiled by Chris Blackford

SUN RA



AND RELATIVE DIMENSIONS IN SPACE

Interview: **Martin McLeish**
Sun Ra (1914-1993)

Interview compiled by Chris Blackford

The following interview was conducted at the 1990 Edinburgh Festival just prior to Sun Ra's performance there with his Arkestra. Unable to find a suitable context for it in the magazine it has remained unpublished ever since. However, on hearing of Sun Ra's death earlier this year, I decided that now would be the most appropriate time for it to see the light of day. It is published here by way of a tribute to Sun Ra – unique entertainer, mystic, and one of the inspirational figures of 20th Century experimental music.

Chris Blackford

"God punishes the weak"

SR Black people are afraid. People in general are afraid – but especially black people – of the truth. We look for easy answers to the world we're in, easy ways to accept truth which blinds us to the real truths, the whole nature of which is hard to accept. As people we are easier to be carried away by our desires in a way that white people never are. We sell ourselves for our desires, in the name of our desires. White people know that if they can satisfy us then they know our price. We are too weak.

MM Is that why you say, "Resist me make me strong"?¹

SR Yeah, but God punishes the weak. God punishes us for being weak as black people. We have to find our own answers.

MM As an architect, when I design something, an activity or housing for activities, I have to shut out impulses that threaten to carry me off at first into unfamiliar, then increasingly into ploughed pastures. How do you go about this?

SR When I talk about the outer worlds, outer nothingness, other worlds, I talk about space. There is nothing in space, just you and your desires, and getting rid of them in space is hard because you will have nothing left. Now, this is like a vacuum, finding something that fills this void is hard when you've got nothing, so I relate the experience I have

of being in space with nothing, no air, nothing. I start with nothing, but then there is something, a comet that races across my mind and I have to move to understand it.

MM Move through space?

SR Move through time. See, all this happens in time, everything is measured in time and to survive in space you have to be beyond time, otherwise you begin to age, to die. When I am in this world I live in time, but on Saturn or Mars there is a different time. When you've got no time you are racing with time, in nothing. Time is on your side and you've got nothing, no preconceptions, just blankness, empty space and impulses, some of which you can understand and combine.

MM What about discipline?

SR There is discipline. In the outer nothingness you've just got you and then if you've not got you, you've not got discipline.

"I've had to reach out... where no human has been before"

MM And your Arkestra?

SR I'm always moving ahead of time. If any of them cannot keep up then I'm gone. That's why I say, "Next Stop Mars". I'm always moving. If they can't keep up then I'm gone. This is because time waits for nobody and while I'm here I'm subject to time. I'm aging, so I've got to move. When I'm ready to move, who isn't gets left behind. For this reason band members come and go. I'm not earthbound, I'm spacebound and this is something I've noticed when in this world (for there are other worlds right here and now, other spaces, galaxies, universes right here and now), that people are static. They don't know how to make time. They waste time, but for me time is precious. So I've got to keep moving.

You see, when astronauts were talking about orbiting earth and then the moon, I was already there, talking about outer limits and spaceways: Next Stop Mars. I was already there ahead of time,

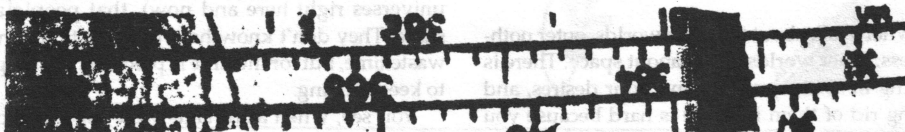
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because to do what I'm doing I've had to reach out... where no human has been before, and I'm doing that right now. I never stop doing it.

MM What about aspirations, what do you plan to do next?

SR Next? You're implying that there is a time scale. In this world there is, but in my world there are only events, simultaneous events, any of which could be occupying my time.

"... they were talking about Coltrane and this new sound, but these people came after me"

MM Are there others in this world doing what you're doing? Can you sense others?

SR There is nobody, never has been, and if there is they are late. I'm moving ahead of them constantly. I've always been ahead, even those with me have catching up to do.

MM In my subject, architecture, we talk about truth and how true are our intentions when we present a set of ideas, designs. It is difficult, I mean, not easy to be honest because half the time I never know what I'm being honest about. Sometimes ideas have origins, other times they come from nowhere but they have to be followed, if you know what I mean. When this happens I think about God being part of me and me being part of God. I know you mentioned God earlier.

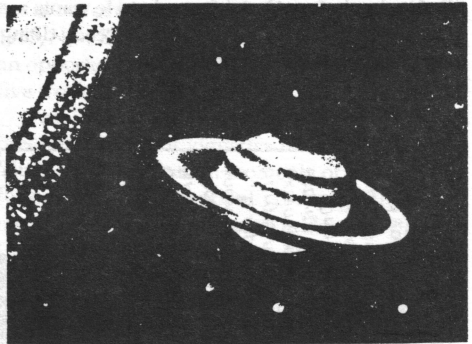
SR You believe in the Bible. I can see you both believe the Bible and you have read it. Yet, you don't sense your own part in it. For me and you to talk right now about God means the Bible. If people don't read it, believe in it, then it cannot continue to form a system of belief. Right now, things are falling apart. Right now, truth is getting distorted, turned around - versions of the Bible. Now Saddam Hussein has said that Kuwait was part of Iraq and that Palestine must be freed before he comes out of Kuwait. He's speaking the truth and God says the truth will prevail. If there is a war Saddam will prevail. I cannot say how. Maybe his

ideas will prevail.

But I have to challenge truths because doing this reveals the depth of truth. I'm not challenging God, I don't say, "What about if?" I just keep moving and if I come to stop I know I'm not near my truth.

MM What about evil?

SR Evil is all right only because truth is stronger and so all evil serves the truth. For humans who resist evil, that only makes it stronger, but once you accept the truth of evil, that there is evil, then you are free to accept truth.



MM In the past you have worked with Walt Dickerson in duets without the Arkestra. Tell me how that came about.

SR I mentioned before that I start with nothing, no starting point, only a continuum, but at all times my Arkestra or an individual is free to take on board my flow.

MM Bouncing ideas off one another?

SR More like linking arms because in all cases I've had my direction before anyone else. Let me tell you something. Way back when they were trying to put men into space they were talking about Coltrane and this *new sound*, but these people came after me. I've been flowing from before that time.

MM Would you collaborate with anyone now?

SR I don't collaborate. I have the Arkestra but I'm ahead of them. I don't need anybody else. Listen, I've talked about time. My time first came when I found space. I've been moving in that time ever since. The Arkestra know. If they never discovered space and the ways of space then they wouldn't be with me now. People now are unable to find space, to think - nothing! To think - space! What I did was back then, men were just landing on the moon and now they're trying to follow. You see you know what I'm talking about. I don't need to elaborate, yet you're afraid.

MM Don't you know fear?

SR No. I only fear God. I fear what He wants me to do next, yet before I know it I'm already doing it and fear is behind me. **R**

Note

1 See Sun Ra's poem *Saga Of Resisiance*. Reprinted on sleeve to *Dancing Shadows* (Magic Music 10013)

SELECTED DISCOGRAPHY

The Nubians Of Plutonia (1959) Saturn 205/Impulse 9265

The Heliocentric Worlds of Sun Ra, Vols 1 & 2 (1965) ESP-Disk (Base) 1014 & 1017

Dancing Shadows (1966) Magic Music 10013

The Sun Myth (nda) Magic Music 10012

Nuits De La Fondation Maeght (1981) Recommended Records 11, recorded 1970

Love In Outer Space (1988) Leo Records CD LR 180, recorded 1983

Pleiades (1993) Leo Records CD LR 210/211, recorded 1990

Friendly Galaxy (1993) Leo Records CD LR 188, recorded 1991



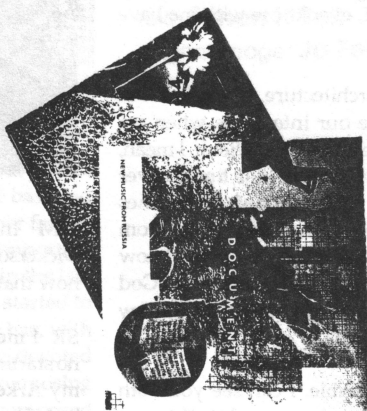
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Videophile

**John Coney Hans-Jürgen Syberberg
Hiroshi Teshigahara Jane Campion**

Wisdom on abstract planes

Uses myth as medium to understanding.

*Thus a living parable to the outward or inward truth
Is every myth;*

*And from the base and the crest of the myth
You can see like from an all revealing eye.¹*

For years many myths and rumours have surrounded the Sun Ra movie *Space is the Place*. It was shown briefly in 1974 in San Francisco, Boston and New York. The media response was slight and unresponsive. Shortly after that it was shelved. Critics and fans have since praised and gossiped about the movie often based only on fragments of information. Now, due to the persistence of the producer's son and Bruce Ricker of Rhapsody Films, it is being screened in the US and released on video in the UK. I got the facts about this elusive film (writes **Gamall Awad**) from its producer **Jim Newman**.

The project was started when Newman and director **John Coney**, who had worked together on television arts programmes, approached Sun Ra. Ra was enthusiastic and provided ideas involving "his idea of a separate alternate destiny for black people apart from a sentence to death on planet Earth." Originally, the film was intended to be a short documentary. After a failed shoot during a show at San Francisco's Planetarium, the filmmakers re-grouped and took Ra and entourage to the Rosicrucian Egyptian Museum. The scenes filmed there include a fantastic dream sequence in which John Gilmore appears as an Egyptian prince, covered in blue make-up and wrapped as a

mummy. He is awakened from death by the hand of Ra and rises from his tomb.

Around the same time the producer put the group in a recording studio and filmed them. Tunes recorded included 'We Travel the Spaceways', 'Calling Planet Earth', 'Satellites Are Spinning' and 'Outer Spaceways Inc.'. This material makes the film special because of the unique way in which it is integrated. The songs are worked into the framework of the narrative so that they take on a whole new level of meaning. For example, when Ra's spaceship heads for Earth, the Arkestra performs 'Calling Planet Earth' and the spaceship itself appears to be moving through the power of music (the soundtrack from the movie is released by Evidence).

Filming continued for a couple of weeks without a set storyline. A giant inflatable spaceship was constructed and reproduced as a small model to use keyed-in over space travel sequences. Ra was filmed arriving from outer space and being confronted by the media. About eight months were spent trying to edit the material into something coherent, without success. At this point, they brought in a scriptwriter from Hollywood, Joshua Smith. He wrote new scenes incorporating the sequences that had been shot. These new scenes involved government agents out to get Ra and teenagers who would interact with Ra and want to join his space travel ventures.

So, a year after beginning the film they were still shooting more material. Smith didn't script everything. The scene where Ra talks to teenagers in a youth centre is completely improvised. Smith helped pull the film together, but he also added some elements that with the passing of time came to be seen as distasteful and unproductive. When re-editing the film in 1992 Jim Newman decided to cut these scenes, thereby shortening the running time by about 20 minutes. The two scenes cut involved two young women attached to Ra's nemesis, the Overseer. One took place in a warehouse and featured the women and government agents; the other took place in a hospital.

One should not, however, overlook Ra's contribution to the movie as "virtually everything of importance came out of his suggestions." Ra did see the re-edited version and approved. The film had cost \$250,000 by the time it was released – not

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Original film poster, November 1974



a small budget for an independent movie in 1974.

Space is the Place is without doubt the most important film on Ra. It is also very much of its time. Comparisons have been drawn with the classic Blaxploitation movie **Sweetback**, which it resembles in its psychedelic, sociological critique of American life. It has also been compared to Alexandro Jodorowsky's **El Topo**, but on a mystical level it's closer to **Holy Mountain**. In the end, **Space is the Place** is an oddball. Moving and seriously philosophical one minute, humorous and silly the next, it's a fitting tribute to the many facets of the creative mastery Ra achieved. I highly recommend it to the converted and to those unfamiliar with his work.

Gamall Awad

Note

1 From the book *The Immeasurable Equation*. This and three other Sun Ra books are available from Omni Press, P.O. Box 786, Millbrae, CA 94030, USA.

Space is the Place (1974/re-edited 1992)

Dir. John Coney; Editor: Jim Newman
with Sun Ra, Ray Johnson, Christopher Brooks
K Jazz Video KJ123 (from: K Jazz Productions,
29 May Road, Rochester, Kent ME1 2HY, UK)

Woman of the Dunes (1964)

Dir. Hiroshi Teshigahara; Music: Toru Takemitsu
with Eiji Okada, Kyoko Kishida
Connoisseur Video CR 077
119 mins, Black & White

A young professor of entomology (Eiji Okada) in a desert surrounding a remote village, searching for that new species which will get his name and reputation forever established in an encyclopedia. He ruminates on the task's absolute need for corroboration and certification; in fact, a certificate for everything in his life, his identity measured out in certificates – finally, even a certificate for a 'missing person'...

He accepts an offer to spend the night in a house in the village which turns out to be a shack at the bottom of a pit: its only inhabitant a young widow. Thus begins his strange imprisonment. Trapped like the insects he studiously pins to boards or keeps in bottles, his confusion turns to anger, to desperation, but never to complete hopelessness.

Teshigahara's bewitching allegory is a testimony to the persistence of the human spirit when all seems incomprehensible; also, perhaps, a political statement about the need for individuality



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in the face of collective coercion and conformity. Larger ideas, however, are never allowed to overburden the essential starkness of the human predicament as it appears in the basic narrative. The ensuing 'relationship' with the woman (Kyoko Kishida) is beautifully paced. She seduces him, first by sleeping naked, ostensibly to avoid "sand rash". Unwittingly, he is acting out a role prescribed by the woman in league with the villagers' "village council" whose deeper motive is revealed to us but not, it seems, to him. Their moments of tenderness and passion are smoothly juxtaposed with shots of the rippled dunes; huge close-ups of sand-flecked skin create a broad, textural landscape of eroticism – temporary escape from the cramped confines of the shack.

Chris Blackford

Parsifal (1982)

Dir. Hans Jürgen Syberberg
with Edith Clever, Robert Lloyd, Armin Jordan
and the voices of Reiner Goldberg, Yvonne Minton
Artificial Eye ART OP1
244 mins Colour

Syberberg's trawl through the highways and byways of German culture occupied much of the 1970s, producing film epics such as *Ludwig* and *Hitler*, plus more 'intimate' films like *Ludwig's Cook* and *Winifred Wagner*. In 1982 this body of work reached its perhaps inevitable climax as HJS took on 'ol RW himself, on the 100th anniversary of *Parsifal*'s first performance at Bayreuth. With Syberberg, we're a long way from either 'filmed theatre' or 'opera on location'; he creates vast, surreal settings (Wagner's death-mask the size of some Teutonic Mount Rushmore), filled with a curious mixture of objects symbolic, dramatic and kitsch. Part of the fascination is that the camera, despite the tableaux, is mainly focused on the actors, most of whom are non-singers lip-synching (very successfully, too). The subject matter is a notoriously heady brew of magic, myth and religion. This production emphasises phallic imagery, a strong case of the Oedipal and a palpable castration anxiety. One major variation involves gender, occurs during the second act, and is fully in line with the depiction of this anxiety. There's also extra emphasis on Kundry, and Clever's mesmerising perform-

ance fully justifies this: the ageless Kundry constantly plays upon, and subverts, male neurosis towards the 'wild woman'. Not a Wagnerite, I was still impressed by the scale and intensity of the music, while constantly intrigued by Syberberg's approach. However, four hours, even split into three acts over two tapes, will prove pretty daunting for many non-believers.

Gerard F Tierney

Jane Campion: Three Short Films

Dir. Jane Campion
Connoisseur Video CR 092

With her latest film, *The Piano*, having established her as one of cinema's most original, younger (born 1955, New Zealand) directorial talents, now seems an opportune moment to look back at the formative work of Jane Campion.

Passionless Moments (1984, 12 mins, b/w) presents a series of vignettes featuring everyday 'characters' involved in moments of absurd, profound, even transcendent contemplation: moments, according to Campion and her co-director Gerard Lee, which each have "a fragile presence which fades almost as it forms." The flatness of the voice-over resembles documentary; expressive camera angles sometimes weave a whimsical poetry out of banal situations. There are echoes of early Greenaway shorts in how the genres merge and collide. **A Girl's Own Story** (1983, 26 mins, b/w) is an evocation of female adolescence during 60s Beatlemania. Family discord, schoolgirl rivalries, sexual awakening, incest and pregnancy through incest, are among the film's intense themes, an intensity spiced with a generous measure of irresistible off-beat humour. An episodic approach to narrative and paranoid framing produce a work as entertaining as it is disturbing. Some of the darker themes surface again in her memorable feature debut *Sweetie* (1989). Finally, **Peel** (1982, 9 mins, Colour), which tells of a father's attempts to discipline his young son, also peels back the layers of normality to reveal an ambiguous zone fizzing with stressed-out tensions and boisterous humour. While Campion's more recent work may have moved closer to the mainstream, it still retains the experimental edge of these shorts. **R**

Chris Blackford



Simon H Fell was born in Dewsbury, West Yorkshire in 1959; he studied double bass and music at school but has had no other formal musical training. Despite an important involvement with improvised music in the late '70s, his career in creative music only started to develop in 1982-83; since then he has, with characteristically obstinate perversity, devoted most of his creative energies to composing improvised music and improvising composed music. The results of these efforts (apart from the alienation of many members of both camps) have included **Compilation I, II** and (in preparation) **III**, as well as a series of chamber compositions for the new music ensemble Cambridge Circus. He is also well known for his vividly inventive improvising with several ensembles including the acclaimed trio Hession/Wilkinson/Fell. He runs the Bruce's Fingers record label.

Report on the Composition of Improvised Music No. 1

text: **Simon H Fell**

original image: **Jo Fell**

In many respects, freedom is a frightening proposition. Social and political history has shown us many times that although the urge towards freedom is very powerful, its realisation brings with it numerous, often considerable, difficulties requiring great responsibilities, restraints and collective consideration which many long-oppressed peoples can find daunting or even overwhelming. Improvising musicians will probably be fully aware of the parallels with their artform; this piece deals with a project aiming to liberate classically trained musicians from the dogmatism of the western concert score, and during the early stages of my work in this field I encountered many (musical) examples of prejudice, arrogance, selfishness and panic before achieving some kind of collective responsibility for the music's realisation.

Combinations

First, the background. Throughout my career, I have been (sporadically) searching for a music which can combine the rhythmic drive and buoyancy of jazz articulations with the strenuous intellectual discipline of contemporary composition in the most modern idiom, and still leave room for the flexibility, spontaneity and joyful serendipity of improvised music. When faced with larger forces, composers and arrangers largely continue to follow the path of primarily reflecting either the western 'concert' composition idiom, or the (albeit sometimes slightly 'outside') jazz-derived big-band tradition, or the large-scale group improvising approach with purely block structural cues as a suggested map. Even those composers who have attempted to combine these idioms have regularly fallen into the trap of a first-one-now-the-other style of juxtaposition which, while superficially interesting, often does not bring the benefits of any of the purer versions of the forms, without synthesising anything genuinely new.

There are, of course, those who would assert that improvised music contains the potential to achieve anything whatsoever within its context, and therefore intrinsically could be this 'ultimate' music. Whilst I have a deep love of improvised music, with the best will in the world there are some things which it is very difficult for it to

achieve. These are aspects of performance which doubtless many would feel are not only undesirable, but the very factors they sought to avoid through an involvement in improvised music. I respect that; I have no desire to proscribe, or in any way deny the marvellousness of completely 'free' improvisation, but let us also have a music which fuses some of the most creative features of improvisation with an ability to make reference to harmonic, rhythmic and melodic contours of unlimited breadth, and immediate textural and dynamic variations which would defy the abilities of even some of our most seemingly-telepathic improvisors.

I am currently working on a series of three compositions that will hopefully point to new ways in which improvisation, jazz and composition might be combined. This has been made possible by a series of commissions all concerning the integration of improvisation into various performance traditions. This has given me a unique opportunity to explore forms of notation and communication within differing musical contexts, and with players of widely differing musical languages. Simultaneously I've also had the opportunity to explore the barriers which prevent musicians from improvising effectively, and to try and devise ways of overcoming these.

I have found in previous experience that many specialist 'classical' musicians react very badly to a situation requiring 'free improvisation'.

The first piece in this series was written at the beginning of 1993 and examined improvisation within the framework of classical performance. The piece took the form of a *Concertino* for improvising double bassist and an octet of flute, oboe, clarinet, bassoon, alto saxophone, French horn, violin and viola, and was premiered in July 1993. The solo part was completely improvised and the main challenge lay in generating performance instructions which could stimulate the other musicians (none of them experienced improvisors) to create a flexible, slightly unpredictable yet architected performance. I have found in previous experience that many specialist 'classical' musicians react very

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DECEMBER 1993

Weds 8th - NORWICH
Norwich Arts Centre
Reeves Yard 8.00pm £4/£3

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33 Arts Centre

Fri 10th - LEEDS
The Termite Club

Sat 11th - MANCHESTER
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badly to a situation requiring 'free improvisation'; when requested to improvise *ad lib* they often feel incapable of contributing anything. Sometimes a performer will resort to a quotation from a favourite composition, or with some encouragement may produce a rather stilted series of self-consciously atonal pitches with perfect conventional articulation. Of course, these performers have the technique to produce some remarkable sounds, and it is not physiological limitations which hamper them; the fear of freedom (and thus the fear of failure) often has this paralysing effect.

By exploring texture, rhythm and melodic contour rather than precise pitch relationships, many of the musicians developed a much more spontaneous and liberated approach to performance.

In order to overcome these problems I decided to offer the musicians much more specific freedoms with other parameters cued very crudely by various means. It was found that notation representing a 'loud, rapid, ascending passage' could be interpreted with a considerable degree of flexibility, but enabled the musicians to shed their fear of freedom since they still felt the protection of a shared architectural shell. Great use was made of symbols representing 'the highest (or lowest) possible note on the instrument', although it had to be repeatedly stressed that this did not have to be a specific 'conventional' pitch, and that it should be the highest sound possible at that particular time. The inevitable effort and discomfort involved in reaching the (particularly) high notes then seemed to liberate the instrumentalists so that the instruction to repeat this note *ad lib* produced some very committed improvising. Another method of stimulating activity was to write rhythmically specified passages for ensemble, but without giving any indication of the tempo required; the musicians would then realise the rhythmic notation at differing speeds, producing passages of great rhythmic complexity. This could also be combined with *ad lib* or approximate pitches to produce an effect resembling improvising counterpoint within the field of conventional tone production. The non-

specific pitch indication was also used with a specific rhythmic notation to achieve rhythmic unisons within 'improvised' tonalities and harmonies.

The next step was to encourage the performers to break out of the comparatively limited world of classical tone production on their respective instruments, and explore the extended sound production techniques often employed as a matter of course by their improvising counterparts. Research enabled me to compile a selection of playing methods for each instrument which, although non-standard, were all fairly common within the contemporary literature. These included flutter tonguing, *sul ponticello*, slap tonguing, etc., with the addition of a few techniques more familiar from the jazz/improvised methodology. It was found that when performers were asked to rapidly alternate between different non-standard playing methods, they became (in classical terms) increasingly cavalier in their approach to the exact nature of the tone being produced. Although the players may not have realised it at the time, this 'cavalier' approach actually began to result in a much more creative attitude to tone production, with musicians trying out their own particular variations on the principal ideas in a way that approached the spontaneity of improvisation.

By diffusing the fear and mistrust of freedom prevalent among many idiomatic musicians perhaps amazing things could happen.

One of the results of this aspect of the work was the development of what amounted to a tone row of instrumental techniques; a pool of methods of playing which could be permuted to form different 'melodic' contours, 'harmony' and counterpoint, all formed from sound texture rather than pitch. Indeed, it is the breaking of this stranglehold that pitch seems to exert on western concert performers that I feel is the most significant first step in this work; some two-thirds of the *Concertino*, for example, has no specified pitches whatsoever, being built up from structures based on rhythms, textures and dynamics. I feel there is a considerable case to be made for re-evaluating the dominant emphasis placed on pitch in

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western musics; whilst one obviously has to respect tradition in music of a historical character, pitch often has too pronounced an importance in creating new musics. By exploring texture, rhythm and melodic contour rather than precise pitch relationships, many of the musicians developed a much more spontaneous and liberated approach to performance.

Fear of Freedom

As a result of the above I was able to structure one movement of the *Concertino* around duo and trio improvisations involving myself and certain musicians who had responded most effectively to the liberating process. Their short improvisations had the conviction of those of musicians with many years specialisation in the field; this is what I would consider to be the true achievement of this work, as some of these players had begun to affect a true synthesis within a classical concert performance.

Other works in this series involve a piece (for

the Termite Festival 1993) based on developing specific and often complex structures for use within the tradition of free improvisation, and a concerto grosso for classical pianist, improvising trio, rock guitarist and expanded jazz big band for 1994. Both of these works will present similar problems to the *Concertino*, but approached from within different traditions; hopefully reports will be available in due course!

By diffusing the fear and mistrust of freedom prevalent among many idiomatic musicians (and the similar suspicion with which many improvisors view anything notated) perhaps amazing things could happen. Yesterday, Rabin and Arafat publicly shook hands; tomorrow a concerto for Derek Bailey with the Vienna Philharmonic Orchestra? Well, alright, I admit some things are just too far-fetched... **R**

For information about **Simon H Fell's** solo, small group and large-scale recordings please send a SAE/IRC to *Bruce's Fingers*, 24 Chantry Road, Haverhill, Suffolk CB9 8BE, England.

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the 1950s and 1960s, the music of the 1970s and 1980s, and the music of the 1990s. The music of the 1970s and 1980s was often more experimental and more complex than the music of the 1950s and 1960s. The music of the 1990s was often more accessible and more mainstream than the music of the 1970s and 1980s. The music of the 1970s and 1980s was often more experimental and more complex than the music of the 1950s and 1960s. The music of the 1990s was often more accessible and more mainstream than the music of the 1970s and 1980s.

western music, which has been largely based on the tradition of music of a historical character. The music of the 1970s and 1980s was often more experimental and more complex than the music of the 1950s and 1960s. The music of the 1990s was often more accessible and more mainstream than the music of the 1970s and 1980s.

9 Personal Remarks on Improvisation

text: Clive Bell
image: Caroline Forbes



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Clive Bell has performed for many years with guitarist Peter Cusack, and with the trio British Summer Time Ends, whose new album is called **Spy Among The Roses**. He co-wrote 'I Feel No Pain' for Indian singer Bindu, which was *New Musical Express* Single of the Week in August '93.

1 *I recently did some filming for a TV schools series called *Mad About Music*. In the morning I recorded a two minute piece of music in a studio; in the afternoon I stood in a Knightsbridge florist's, surrounded by dead trees and dyed grasses, miming to the same piece, over and over about twenty times, while the crew filmed close-ups of fingers, mouth, etc. I found this miming very difficult, but at least the piece was not improvised – for the same series Courtney Pine had to mime to an improvisation he had played earlier on.*

2 *Composers can spend ages deciding what notes to write, but an improviser has the luxury of having to play it right now. I remember the cellist Colin Wood saying this was why he played improvised music, "Otherwise I would have all week to make my mind up."*

3 *In Italy this Spring I saw Roscoe Mitchell and Muhal Richard Abrams, venerable old improvisors from the Chicago scene. They came on stage with several minutes of adjusting music stands, opening spectacle cases, fiddling with sheet music. Then Abrams worked up a good head of steam on the piano, occasionally looking at his music. After a time Mitchell decided this was the point in the piece when he was to play a sax solo. He glared meaningfully at Abrams, who took no notice at all and went on flooding the keyboard. Mitchell sulked for a while but eventually walked over and audibly told Abrams to shut up so he could play his solo. When the solo came it was extreme, passionate and squeaking right off the end of what the instrument was capable of. The audience was bewildered but responded enthusiastically to the high personal drama on stage.*

4 *Japanese classical music has no tradition of improvisation. Instead it has a tradition of teachers who make deep and inscrutable remarks. I studied the shakuhachi (bamboo flute) in Tokyo. After two years of getting me to imitate every nuance of his playing, my teacher told me that improvisation lay at the heart of shakuhachi music. I was happy to pay him for saying this sort of thing, and I have been trying ever since to work out what he meant.*

5 *Surely Company Week used to be a bit more musically exciting? Now they seem to play a sub-genre of music called "Company Music". It's very respectful and 'chamber', full of clicky*

flurries and furrowed brows. It's a bit cosy, a bit unemotional, and you can't imagine any of them getting mad and refusing to play with each other. And the sound is not too good because it's all played through little guitar amps and there's no proper PA. There are still some fine pieces played of course, but like at the Cup Final, some of the players seem overawed by the occasion.

6 *I recently gave a lesson to a pupil who had a quartz crystal tied to her instrument with a silk scarf. She told me the instrument would sound better that way. I tried it, and something was certainly different. As I gazed into the crystal I could feel my brain decaying. Crystals were used a good deal in Atlantis, in fact they had enormous crystals to provide power for whole cities, rather like nuclear power stations. I saw a French book in a shop window in Paris: "From the Crystals of Atlantis to the Prayer Wheels of the American Indian". Don't say you haven't been warned.*

7 *Good improvisation comes like a thief in the night.*

8 *Which word do you use when you talk about improvisation? Do you call it free music? What about "improv" – would you say "we did an improv"? Only actors say that, surely. Does anyone "have a blow"? When did you last hear the word "jamming"? Have you played "out"? I am an improviser, you play free stuff, he does squeaky-bonk. But my favourite is "wiggling out".*

9 *Don't be rude to drummers – they have sticks and you don't. John Stevens of course has a reputation for telling the audience to shut the fuck up if there's a bit of chatting during his set. I saw Han Bennink the other day take on a man in the front row who made cheerful comments to his friend towards the end of every piece. The man enjoyed Han's playing and thought he was hilarious. "You have a lot to say – you disturb me very much!" barked Han in a frightening Dutch accent. "Sorry!" chuckled the man, still enjoying the show. "You think this is a fucking joke?" shouted Han rising to his full red-faced height. This is all part of the great intimacy you get at concerts of improvisation. R*

Prime cuts

Tenko/Ikue Mori

Death Praxis

What Next? WN0011 CD

Catherine Jauniaux/Ikue Mori

Vibraslaps

Rec Rec RecDec 52 CD

If, like me, you don't associate the drum machine with much expressive and rhythmic subtlety, then these two albums (in some respects companion pieces) featuring Japanese drum machinist Ikue Mori, now a stalwart of the New York improv scene, should cause you to revise that preconception. Mori's approach to this instrument is by far the most sensitive I've heard. Crisp and decisive, her ideas unfold swiftly from tiny Oriental repetitions to sudden, dramatic timpani crescendos. Although she uses three self-programmed machines simultaneously the sounds are structured with a remarkable clarity and sense of space, providing a stimulating counterpoint to two very different and distinctive vocalists.

Tenko, another Japanese improviser based in New York, draws on Japanese song and an almost childlike simplicity of phrasing to give *Death Praxis* a sometimes eerie, ethereal quality. Her vocals are mostly multitracked and nowhere more atmospherically arranged than the brooding, chiaroscuro interiors of 'Glow Worm'. 'I Know You', a delightful, romantic-sounding song is guaranteed to have you humming long after the amp cools.

I had the pleasure of hearing the Jauniaux/Mori duo at the LMC Festival in 1992. *Vibraslaps*, a NYC studio recording (the same studio used

for *Death Praxis*), captures the same kind of fast-flowing excitement of that live set. Jauniaux (from Brussels) lives up to that "human sampler" description, theatrically touching on Piaf, Eisler and Weill as well as achieving near-operatic grandeur on 'Mentira' and a cartoon cuteness on 'Betty Boop'. Don't choose between these albums - get both if your pocket permits, for two outstanding vocalists and the best drum machinist around.

Chris Blackford

Martin Archer

The Venona Breaks

No Music No.1 MC

Despite the editor's misgivings (*Wire* 114), sound on this chrome tape is excellent, better than the last Hornweb vinyl disc (though Chris Blackford is right to moan about Arts Council support not stretching to distribution and tours). You need this digital finesse for Archer's glittering and distinctive music. Percussionist Roger Turner is simply astonishing, his jetstream of timbral variations admirably setting off ensemble horn-charts (James Brown meets Richard Strauss) and free bravado.

There are some drawbacks. I'm not sure the symphonic scale works: themes are nicely broached and returned to, but there is so much light and shade in every section it is hard to make out any overarching structure. In 'Snow At Sea' it occurred to me that, to achieve the BYG starkness he's aiming for, Archer hadn't exacted enough fervour from his horn-players (his own soprano is as acute as ever). However, if you are intrigued by the idea of improvisors caught in the arc-light brilliance of Edgard Varese or Michael Finnis, a listen to this is essential.

(Only available from 5 *Oakholme Mews, Sheffield S10 3FX, England* - £5.00)

Ben Watson

Billy Jenkins/Vanessa Mackness/Tony Messenger

Actual Reality

VOTP VOCA AR1 2MC

Maybe you did as Brian Eno said and turned the record player down so low you could hardly hear it, or rigged up a third 'ambient' speaker, or even

flipped the TV on its side to watch **Thursday Afternoon**. You did? Then you're just the sort of person who'll want to experiment with Billy Jenkins' instructions for **Actual Reality**.

Take two cassette machines. Place two pairs of speakers about three metres apart. Pop in the two cassettes, and play simultaneously. It mainly hinges on the likelihood that your machines will drift out of sync like Steve Reich's loops did in the mid-60s. Not that the music on the cassettes is identical, though I assume some passages were timed to occur simultaneously, so that when they don't you catch the drift, so to speak. Jenkins has used material from three of his previous albums, plus newly recorded contributions from Vanessa Mackness (vocals), Tony Messenger (sampling), Martin France (groove drums) and himself (keyboards). I found it cute, disturbing, sexy, silly, powerful: a surging Mexican Wave as one machine follows the other into aural chaos. I tried it with two ghetto blasters. Those of you with four ears should try it with two Walkmans!

Chris Blackford

Peter Kowald/Werner Ludi/Butch Morris/

Sainkho Namchylak

When The Sun Is Out You Don't See Stars

FMP CD 38 CD

Sainkho Namchylak

Letters

Leo CD LR 190 CD

Sainkho Namchylak

Lost Rivers

FMP CD 42 CD

Siberian-born, Sainkho Namchylak, first came to light as an improviser in 1989 with the Russian group TRI-O (see **Document** review in **Rubberneck** 12). Subsequent touring throughout Europe has convinced some that she is one of the most exciting and challenging vocalists now working in improvised music. Words like 'exotic' and 'other-worldly' are pale attempts to describe the unusual and decidedly non-Western sound colours she creates in her performances. These three releases also demonstrate that there is a lot more to Sainkho's art than just Tuvan 'throat-singing',



though that does have a special fascination.

When The Sun Is Out... is a superb blending of US/European talents; blend being the operative word here because for much of the time everybody stays dynamically and texturally close together; not imitating each other (as one reviewer mistakenly put it), but individual statements swelling out and upwards from a drone-like core, given solid cohesion by Kowald's darkly resonant bass. Sainkho's vocals, far from being the exotic wild card, actually highlight how far her colleagues here have travelled outside conventional notions of Western tone colour and harmony. 73 minutes is a generous helping of richly detailed improvisation.

Letters is probably the best place for newcomers to start, offering the variety of Sainkho in duo and group combinations with members of the six-piece Kieloor Entartet, and an opportunity to experience her extraordinary unaccompanied solo work. 'Letter 1' is straight-ahead jazz improv with Sainkho embellishing Sten Sandell's lyrical piano lines; 'Letter 3', with bassist Joelle Leandre, begins lightly, is twisted, then arrives at a curious passage where Leandre produces something akin to an ill-tempered motorcycle.

For a complete immersion in the solo Sainkho try **Lost Rivers**. At 74 minutes it's best absorbed in manageable doses. 'Night Birds' features some astonishing plaintive, bird-like cries and shrieks, delicate warbling and nocturnal hooting. 'Tovarishi' cackles and captures childlike emotions through infant gibberish; 'Dream of Death' borders on the maniacal, disturbing with its asphyxiated gasps. You'll either be drawn in and utterly fascinated by these 13 pieces (as I am) or find them impossible to cope with. This is extreme, uninhibited vocal work which deserves your attention. (FMP: distrib. Cadillac 071 278 7391)

Chris Blackford

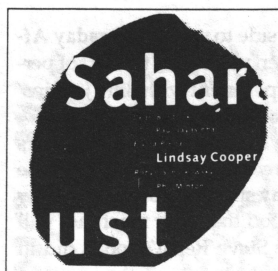
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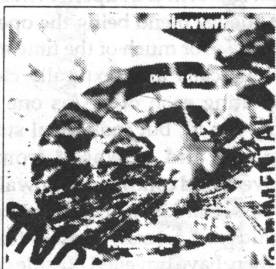
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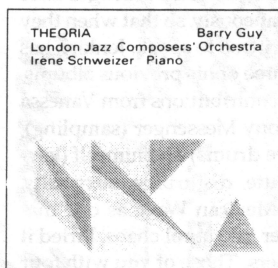
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Phil Minton: Voice
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Simon Picard, Barre Phillips,
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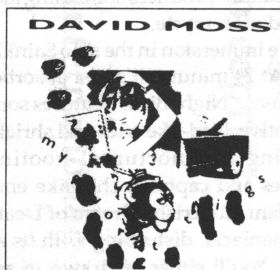
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Roscoe Mitchell & Muhal Richard Abrams
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 Black Saint 120133-2 CD

Two excellent jazz titles for those who reach for the garlic when they see the word "Marsalis".

Having successfully integrated new alto player Steve Adams, the California-based Rova offers a further convincing demonstration of some of the ways in which improvisation and composition can be beautifully interwoven – and I mean compositions, not "heads". From the propelling riffs of 'Swang' to the lyricism of 'Pinnacle', from the ante-mortem Cage tribute of 'Cage For John Cage' to the closing 'Streak', everything is of a very high calibre; even the 18-odd minute long 'The Floater' doesn't outstay its welcome. Personal favourite is baritone motormouth Jon Raskin, but it's the whole group – beautifully recorded and wisely placed in the stereo field – that's very good.

Duets And Solos is the kind of record it takes minutes to like and ages to penetrate; two masters of colour and nuance (and structure!) are reunited in a very clearly recorded live setting (New York 1990). The two solo tracks are merely very good: 'Scenes And Colors' for piano, with its subterranean sense of the blues; and 'Star Night' for (what I believe to be) a curved soprano, with its accurate, discreet, typically anti-virtuosic performance. What's astounding is the degree of mutual empathy of the duets, where flute, other saxophones and synthesizer are added to the palette. This is one of the rare instances when one can believe that each and every note really matters. Required listening? Sure. My record of the year? You bet.

Giuseppe Colli

Derek Bailey/John Stevens
 Playing
 Incus CD 14 CD

Playing is the first duo album by pioneer improvisors Derek Bailey and John Stevens in

their 25 years or so association. Fiercely non-idiomatic, it's also one of the most demanding albums I've heard this year. Bailey on electric and acoustic guitars, John Stevens, a restricted drum kit of two small high-hats, children's snare and a few cymbals, plus mini trumpet. Nine tracks teeming with complex, seamless transitions – the choppy, abbreviated phrasing of Bailey's guitar set against Stevens' rapid-fire snare rolls and shuffling, scuffed-up cymbal sounds. Only 'Reflecters' and 'D Baby' indulge in anything remotely like regular pulse and then only fleetingly. The interplay is concise and to the point; ideas are stated, then nipped back as new shoots spring up. After a few hearings one becomes attuned to the percussive and rhythmic nuances of the guitar playing and how they interact with the more conventional percussive sounds. 'The Instance' is that mini trumpet blown shrill, ragged and finally delicately, underpinned by the slenderest of electric guitar tones. A benchmark recording in duo improvising.

Chris Blackford

Barry Guy
 Fizzles
 Maya MCD 9301 CD

Time was when the double bass player stood at the back of the stand plunking through a series of routine chord progressions while, to use Paul Rogers' words in *Rubberneck* 8, "the horn players wank in front doing their ego-trip". But in improv's non-hierarchical forum the double bass has blossomed into a fully developed instrumental voice capable of the most remarkable sensitivity. Barry Guy has been one of those principally responsible for this transformation and *Fizzles*, his new solo album, is a marvellous example of where progressive bass playing is currently situated. In fact, such is the register range achieved by his innovative techniques, that he appears to have absorbed the soundworlds of related instruments like violin, viola, cello and even some guitar mannerisms such as those employed on the splendidly rocky 'Hilibili Meets... The Brush'. 'Invention – The Bird of Infinity' entertains elegant flashes of flamenco and for the last of the 'Five Fizzles' (which are dedicated to Samuel Beckett)

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he deals out a frightening percussive assault on the instrument. Barry Guy's desire to break down the barrier between instrument and musician is best experienced by hearing **Fizzles** on headphones, which will bring you closer to/inside the instrument's gigantic vibrating body. This is virtuosic technique at one with a highly expressive imagination.

Chris Blackford

Unknown Public

Volume 2: Common Ground

UP 02 CD/MC

Volume 3: pianoFORTE

UP 03 CD/MC

Music for flugelhorn and organ (Ian Carr and John Taylor) recorded in what was Shakespeare's parish church – the subject is **The Tempest**, and recording is interrupted by a torrential thunderstorm. Meanwhile marimbas of slate (made by Will Menter) are played to an audience 200 feet underground in a Welsh slate cavern.

These are two of the pieces on **Unknown Public 02**, whose theme is *Common Ground*, or the musician's response to place. The CD magazine is into its third issue now – each one contains about a dozen recordings of contemporary "creative music", including regular features like the **Scratchpad** (one minute snatches) and the **Contemporary Classic** (Trevor Wishart and Graham Fitkin).

The most striking music here features the multitracked trombones of Fayyaz Virji, inspired by the Indian flute of Hariprasad Chaurasia. There's also a three minute gem by Kevin Duggan, to be played on small organs as found in remote Scandinavian churches. Like something out of **Babette's Feast**, Duggan is the organist on the Danish island of Aero.

The magazine is not just a CD – there are detailed notes on each piece, and some short essays, though the designer has worked hard to make these look like surrealist poetry. One that is still legible is Billy Jenkins' macabre notes on "crap pianos": "Do not attempt surgery. Enjoy a prolonged lingering death."

Issue 03's theme is *pianoFORTE* – not only tick-

ling the ivories but loud vs soft. So we have Graham Fitkin's 'Loud' for six pianos, Alquimia's tapeworming travels through the womb, and a preview of Michael Nyman's pseudo-Victorian soundtrack for Jane Campion's film **The Piano**. The two piano improvisors are both excellent, Alex Maguire admirably compressing his usual 50 minute epics to 9' 55", and Benoit Delbecq creating a subtle world of creaks and taps for the becalmed 'Bateau'. But I'm afraid the best piece is the one with me on it – Jan Steele's 'Camelan Disco', a big sparkling thump for sax, tin whistle, two pianos and tuba.

Clive Bell

Ned Rothenberg

The Crux:

Selected Solo Wind Works (1989-92)

Leo CD LR 187 CD

Not having paid much attention to Ned Rothenberg's career in the past, I'm pleased to say that **The Crux** has turned out to be something of a special discovery for me. It features the New York reedsman on alto saxophone and bass clarinet as well as one suitably windswept piece written for shakuhachi. With circular breathing playing an important part in a few of these improvisations, I suppose there is bound to be at least a 'family resemblance' to the solo soprano work of Evan Parker, in particular. The opening 'Intimations' for alto uses this technique to support a compelling multiphonic piece which adds to and interweaves its melodic lines in ways reminiscent of Philip Glass' work. Perhaps this school of complex saxophony has more in common with popular minimalism than we might care to admit? And that might be an interesting promotional angle for this so-called 'difficult' music...

Anyway, Rothenberg's album contains some passionate music, regardless of whatever else we decide to call it. 'The Crux' steps up several gears from its gorgeous, languorous opening section and takes on a rhythmic drive close to Balkan folk or even new wave. There are tributes to Monk, Maceo Parker and NR's shakuhachi teachers Goro Yamaguchi and Katsuya Yokoyama. Ned also writes the illuminating sleeve notes.

Chris Blackford

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Phil Minton and Roger Turner

Dada da

Leo CD LR 192 CD

Lindsay Cooper

Sahara Dust

Intakt CD 029 CD

Earlier this year I was fortunate enough to hear Phil Minton at two very different gigs in the space of a week. The first with percussionist Roger Turner, where the duo *just* outnumbered the audience, and the second in performance with Lindsay Cooper's *Oh Moscow* group. What came across most emphatically from this experience was just how interrelated Phil's abstract/improvised and scripted/jazz-ish singing is; how plausibly one mutates within milliseconds into the other – Cooper's work with composed and improvised elements is, of course, the ideal place to hear this interrelationship in action. *Dada da*, however, is the more 'extreme' abstract context with Turner. 10 tracks phonetically titled ('la dee da', 'la la', etc.), packed with microtonal detail. Turner's nimble cymbal rubs and scrapes emphasising the metallic textures of his percussive armoury; Minton exploring a complementary, virtually wordless terrain where tiny overtones crackle and sigh with a wonderful intimacy. Also, humanity, flowing from the physicality of both musicians' techniques. Sometimes traditionally 'ugly' or 'banal' sounds reshaped and given a liberating syntax within this context. This is a vital duo with lots more ground to explore.

Phil Minton is also the vocalist on Lindsay Cooper's latest five-part song-cycle *Sahara Dust* (lyrics by Robyn Archer). His role here is more conventional, though there are opportunities to exercise the throat muscles in other directions when the six-piece meanders off into space allocated for improvisation. Dean Brodrick's and Elvira Plenar's acoustic and electronic keyboards expand the soundscape in line with the general theme of private tensions in global village Earth: the vastness of the world, yet the mediatizing of it brings distant events like the Gulf War to our living rooms, or rain bearing particles of Sahara sand lands on our doorsteps – the latter being the work's central metaphor. Familiar Cooper refer-

ence points like East European folk music and art cabaret are woven with jazz and chamber composition into memorable themes. *Sahara Dust* is a real treat for those who enjoy a resonant text coupled with an adroit amalgamation of composition and improvisation. One of the year's great genre-busting works.

Chris Blackford

Frisque Concordance

Spellings

Random Acoustics RA 001 CD

Frisque Concordance is John Butcher (tenor and soprano saxophones), Hans Schneider (double bass), Martin Blume (drums) and leader/instigator Georg Grawe (piano). *Spellings* is a concert performance which took place in Bochum (Germany) in 1992 and was only the second time this improvising quartet had played together, although its members have performed in various other combinations. The results are spectacular, but achieved in a refined manner; the group seldom goes for out and out power-play. In painterly terms Butcher and Grawe apply the lighter tones, Schneider and Blume the darker, textural shading.

Grawe's performance here is markedly different from the near impenetrable School of Cecil *Piano Duets* with Marilyn Crispell, released last year by Leo Records. *Spellings* displays his more lyrical side, an open rolling style which gives much of this music its unfussy elegance. Butcher is impressive too, and, at risk of repeating myself, is not only the key European improv saxophonist of his generation, but also one of the major sax innovators (of any generation) now working in this field. He plays with customary poise, achieving barbed tension and melodic flourishes, like the delightful flute-like sonorities on soprano on 'Spelling B', with notable economy; he has also found a way of making the usually hermetic, circular-breathing-multiphonic-mode receptive to group improvisation. To use an expression currently fashionable among the boxing fraternity – Frisque Concordance is "focused". Georg Grawe couldn't have hoped for a more auspicious start to his newly-founded Random Acoustics label.

Chris Blackford

SPELLINGS

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Frisque Concordance

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hans schneider martin blume

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Heiner Goebbels

Shadow / Landscape With Argonauts
ECM 1480 513 372-2 CD

If you know Heiner Goebbels' past work with fellow-German composer Alfred 23 Harth and/or his earlier ECM collaboration with German writer Heiner Müller, *The Man In The Elevator* (1988), you won't be surprised by the ambitious eclecticism of his latest album which started out as a *New Work for Radio* commissioned by the Massachusetts Cultural Council. The *Shadow* in its title refers to a parable by Edgar Allan Poe whose atmospheric literature has also been the stimulus in recent years for Diamanda Galas and Peter Hammill, and most recently Philip Glass. *Landscape With Argonauts* is another text by Heiner Müller. What unites these texts is a theme of catastrophe: an ancient one in Poe's case, whereas Müller's splintered narrative poem evokes a nightmarish urban scenario with echoes of J G Ballard.

The 16-part work (52 mins) moves from text to text in fairly leisurely fashion, without an urgent need to build tension by unexpected cross-cutting between texts. Intertextual resonances are established over time rather than forced upon the listener. *Shadow* is sung and read by Iranian-born Sussan Deihim whose marvellously, husky-sensuous and forbidding intonation is the most dramatic feature of the work. Goebbels multitracks her voice to splendid effect. *Landscape* is 'read' by 100 inhabitants of Boston, USA, recorded in the local streets. Here, the multitracking and rapid montage structure leads to some humorous and self-parodic metatextual moments when the locals wonder what the hell they're being asked to read. There's a non-Western flavour to some arrangements while others incorporate elements of funk, rap, rock, jazz balladry, etc. Instrumentalists are René Lussier (guitar), Charles Hayward (percussion, tipan), Christos Govetas (clarinet, chumbush, gardon) and Heiner Goebbels (keyboards, programming, accordion). This is an adventurous work, a potential recipe for pomposity in the wrong hands, but Goebbels' proven skill as a disciplined arranger of highly eclectic material keeps the project on the rails.

Chris Blackford

Anthony Braxton/Evan Parker

Duo (London) 1993
Leo CD LR 193 CD

Evan Parker/John Stevens

Corner To Corner
Ogun OGCD 005 CD

If you're expecting a gigantic workout between these two giants of the modern saxophone then you could be in for something of a surprise. Far from rumbustious or combative, this set – recorded at the Bloomsbury Theatre as part of the 1993 London Jazz Festival – principally speaks of common ground geniality. John Fordham refers to Warne Marsh in connection with Evan Parker in the sleeve notes, and it also seems appropriate to mention one of Marsh's 'cool' colleagues, Lee Konitz, since many parts of these five improvisations suggest the breezy, elegant rapport those saxophonists attained. Details of the instrumentation are not spelt out, but it's my guess that Braxton is on alto and Parker switching between tenor and soprano. It really is a joy to hear two musicians known for their technical / cerebral weight playing with such an affecting warmth of expression, sometimes toning things down to a serene murmur or locking into thrilling, circular breathing passages where melodic fragments spark and burn bright momentarily. The 'coda' to the final piece is as gruff and aggressive as they get. If you haven't yet been smitten by either of these players then this is the place for a timely conversion.

Corner To Corner finds Evan Parker in the company of another stalwart improviser and long-time associate, percussionist John Stevens. The two go way back to the 60s where they pioneered the approach in the seminal British improv group SME (Spontaneous Musical Ensemble). Stevens plays occasional trumpet and the same restricted kit as the one featured on *Playing* (Incus, 1993); and if you have that album or are going to have it, I daresay you'll want this one, too. Parker's playing is certainly not as overtly melodic on *Corner To Corner* as was the case in the aforementioned Anthony Braxton duets. These seven pieces with Stevens are essentially non-idiomatic and like *Playing* involve a great

deal of intricate interaction. The point at which the two musicians meet is usually hard to pin down; sometimes one senses that it's a general mood that's being mutually felt and shaped; and sometimes the common ground has more to do with the shape of the space between the sounds. One identifiable motif that crops up in a few places is Stevens' use of sustained trumpet tones on which Parker embroiders a little soprano multiphonic magic. Steve Beresford unhesitatingly declares in his sleeve notes: "Free improvisation is certainly the UK's most important recent contribution to the music world." **Corner To Corner** confirms the validity of that statement.

Chris Blackford

Chris Burn

A Henry Cowell Concert
Acta 7 CD

American composer Henry Cowell (1897-1965) is regarded as one of the outstanding early innovators of 20th Century music, though I suspect that most followers of experimental music (myself included) will be more familiar with the work and reputation of his pupil, the late John Cage. British pianist Chris Burn has previously recorded piano music by both composers (see **A Fountain Replete**, Acta 2) but here mainly concentrates on what is perceived as Cowell's most exploratory years of piano composition – 1915-1930 (19 of the 21 pieces played come from this period). Burn's lucid sleeve notes provide an excellent introduction to Cowell's inventive playing techniques which included strumming, plucking, scraping and stopping the strings; he also developed the use of note-clusters produced by the performer's fist, flat of the hand or forearm(s) – "an action akin to a karate chop."

A number of the pieces on **A Henry Cowell Concert** were inspired by Oriental musics and Celtic mythology, such as 'The Trumpet of Angus Og' where the melody is virtually hammered out percussively at the top end of the instrument; 'The Fairy Answer' uses a strumming motion to produce a distorted echo of the conventionally played theme. 'Sinister Resonance' achieves its strangely dislocated ambience by plucking the strings; most mysterious, however, is 'The Ban-

shee' where Burn creates the disturbing wail by some atmospheric rubbing and scraping inside the piano. Elsewhere, 'The Tides of Manaunaun' involves thunderous clusters which gradually subside – Burn deploying the required extended techniques to subtle effect. Improv devotees unfamiliar with Cowell's work should be pleased to discover the relevance of the composer's pathbreaking experiments to subsequent developments in improvised pianistic technique. Chris Burn, who is also a first-rate improviser and who performs these pieces with the necessary vitality, is the ideal person to establish such a link. Highly recommended.

Chris Blackford

King Crimson

The Great Deceiver (Live 1973-74)
Discipline/Virgin KC DIS 1 (4CD Set)

Previously unheard live recordings from the most progressive Crimson team: Cross, Fripp, Wetton, Bruford (but no Jamie!). The improv material is heavy, focused, remarkable. Only Henry Cow went further, but Crimson played this to thousands and thousands! 68-page "scrapbook", too.

Chris Blackford

Iggy Pop

Wild America EP
Virgin Records America 7243 8 92106 7 5

People are wary of the absolute release of inhibitions implied in Iggy's stance – until they witness it. When they do, they agree: there's no performer to touch him. 'Wild America' has the inspirational soda-jerk stupidity that characterised **Soldier and Party**; 'Credit Card' combines chugging rifferama with patent romanticism; 'Come Back Tomorrow' balances the absurdist caterwauling of **Zombie Birdhouse** with doomy echo-rock from the **The Idiot**; 'My Angel' is husky and caressing and undemanding. Iggy's pared-down starkness gives the lie to the rationales of the rock charade. You don't need the back-catalogue to appreciate these songs, just ears for a voice without bullshit apologies, without tedious myths and without fear. **R**

Ben Watson

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 rubberneck (Amer. slang) a gaping
 sightseer, an inquisitive person. — v.
 (Amer. slang) to behave as a rubberneck.
 rubbery adj. like rubber.
 n. 1. waste or worthless material.
 rubbishy adj. rubbishy enough fragment.

... short ideas repeated
 Massage the brain ...
 Robert Ashley, 1979